7:Johnson K-4 (no date) 1958
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

STUDIES OF IRISH RURAL SETTLEMENT

JAMES H. JOHNSON

361
121

UNTIL recently it was generally thought that isolated farms, dispersed over the cultivated land (Fig. 1), formed a settlement pattern of great antiquity in Ireland. Without investigating the matter deeply, academic geographers explained this pattern in several ways. Some saw it as a product of the pastoral emphasis of Irish agriculture, which necessitated a close relationship between a farmer's residence and his fields.[1] Others, especially Meitzen, regarded the dispersed farms as a direct result of the Celtic heritage of the country.[2] And although professional geographers preferred a cultural explanation, school textbooks tended to seize on an environmental factor, seeing dispersed settlement as a product of the moist Irish climate, which required no concentration on wet-point sites and presumably allowed the cultural factors free play.[3]

Contemporary Studies

361

Work by modern geographers on the critical study of Irish rural settlement began in County Donegal. Here E. E. Evans[4] showed that, in parts of the county at least, the single isolated farm is a relatively recent form of settlement, which dates from the nineteenth century rather than survives from any great antiquity. Modern dispersed settlement in Donegal was in fact preceded by "clachans"—clusters of farm dwellings and their associated outbuildings, usually grouped without any formal plan and in the early nineteenth century often consisting of as many as 30–40 houses. Although these clachans normally lacked both inn and church, communal life and the exchange of services were characteristic, and as a rule their inhabitants were related by blood.

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[113] [1] A. Demangeon: La géographie de l'habitat rural (International Geographical Congress, London and Cambridge, 1928: Report of the Commission on Types of Rural Settlement, pp. 41–80), p. 59.

[2] August Meitzen: Siedelung und Agrarwesen der Westgermanen und Ostgermanen, der Kelten, Römer, Finnen und Slawen (3 vols. and atlas, Berlin, 1895), Vol. 1, pp. 174–182.

● [312] [3] The advantage of universal water supplies in Ireland is more apparent than real. In parts of County Fermanagh, for example, farmers must carry drinking water hundreds of yards to their dispersed farms (cf. J. M. Mogey: Rural Life in Northern Ireland [Oxford, 1947], pp. 35–36), when nucleation around the most satisfactory supply would seem to be a logical arrangement. Personal observation suggests that this is a not uncommon situation on many Irish farms.

[113] [4] Some Survivals of the Irish Openfield System, *Geography*, Vol. 24, 1939, pp. 24–36; Donegal Survivals, *Antiquity*, Vol. 13, 1939, pp. 207–222.

➤ Mr. Johnson is Lecturer in Geography at University College, London.

[p. 554]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

CHAPTER XVIII

SOME CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS. I.

With the many material survivals from the past which we have mentioned in earlier chapters there lives on an imposing body of customs and superstitious beliefs of which we can attempt to give no more than a summary description. They concern not only the visible world with its common elements and events—water, fire, stones, salt, iron, trees, cattle, crops, harvest, food and drink, birth, marriage and death—and the relics of former ages—raths or "forths," great stone monuments, stone axes, flint arrowheads, spinning whorls and "crocks of gold"—but also the unseen or rarely glimpsed world of giants, fairies and other beings. All the major processes of the farmer's year had their appropriate magic rites which clung to them from the beginning. Many of these superstitions are so deep-rooted that centuries of opposition from the Christian Church have failed to suppress them, and while it has driven some practices into secrecy it has been forced to take others under its protection.

This applies, for instance, to the cult of holy wells, which is, like the worship of stones and the veneration of thorn trees, probably megalithic in origin and seems to carry us back to the sunnier lands of the Mediterranean where the megalithic religion took its rise. It has been calculated that there are some 3,000 holy wells in Ireland: many of them are still visited, generally at the festival seasons which we described in the last chapter, and it is customary for the devotees to tie

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

312 788 755 778 strings of beads, rags or bits of clothing in the holy tree which often overhangs the well, so that it may bear their ailments. I happened to come across a well near Cork just after midsummer this year. Alongside were the smouldering remains of a great bonfire which had been lit on St. John's Eve. The visitors to the well, having drunk the water, walked three times sunwise around the corbelled stone well-cover, and taking up pebbles kept ready to hand in crevices, they made the sign of the cross on certain stones which were marked with deep grooves which generations of patrons had cut by the same process. Some wells have old "cup-marks" instead of crosses, and it seems probable that these pagan symbols were made long ago in the same way as the crosses which have replaced them. Their round completed, the visitors [825] looked into the well, for if they were to recover from their ailments they would see the trout which is reputed to live there and to show itself only to the cured.

The virtues of these wells are many: they are believed to be efficacious in such varied complaints as eye-disease, lameness, toothache and in some cases barrenness The first Sunday of each quarter of the Celtic year is generally the visiting time, but perhaps on account of the weather the summer festivals, and especially midsummer, are most popular. Pins and other bits of metal are sometimes deposited in wells. Offerings are also made to certain trees in the form of pins stuck in the bark, each pin representing a wish. Special gatherings known as patterns or pardons were held at such sites on the anniversary of the patron saint of the district. Devotions were followed by dancing and games which often degenerated into fights. It is possible to see relics of paganism in the sanctity of such sites, and it is worth recalling that some of the more celebrated centres of pilgrimage in western Europe, like Santiago da Compostella, seem to have megalithic connexions.

788 823 778 The mention of cup-marks brings us to the superstitions concerning the great stone monuments with which they are often associated. A recent article in the *Ulster Journal of*

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

or the influence of the evil-eye; and that she had been told by some of the people that they had seen little men, dressed in green, and headed by two others dressed in black, running over the hills. 776 [854]

In a recent Paper,[1] Professor A. C. Haddon gives the following:—"In Innisbofin, Co. Galway, the people have a very firm belief in fairies. Mr. Allies, who resides there, informed me that one old man told him that he saw a number of fairy girls, dressed in brown, around him one day when he (Mr. Allies) was shooting rabbits. Mr. Allies offered £50 if a fairy could be shown to him, and £100 if he took a photograph of one. Mr. Allies has not yet paid away any money. Mr. Allies and his brother were quarrying a rock by the side of the harbour, and at last the men refused to work at it any longer, as it was so full of 'good people' as to be hot."

It is remarkable that the leprachaun does not appear in any of the fairy tales of these islands, though the fir dearg figures largely in them.

1. *Customs.*—The old customs kept up here are said not to be numerous. Wakes and funeral observances have been already referred to (p. 352). Beltane-fires are lighted on St. John's Eve, round which the people gather, and, when the fire becomes low, they leap through the smoke over the embers. 372 796

The custom of chasing the wren on St. Stephen's Day, so common throughout the greater part of Ireland, is said not to be known here. [184]

There are two holy wells on the islands, one, Tober Flannain, in the graveyard close to Tempull Colman, in the townland of Knock, is reputed to have worked many marvellous cures; and the other, Tober Leo, on Inishshark, not far from the cloghan of the saint, is also of great local fame. 312 778 755

For the following note on Inishshark, I am indebted to Mr. Michael Lavelle:— 172

"There is yet shown a ruin called Cloghan Leo, in which he (St. Leo) is said to have dwelt; also fourteen stations, to each of which on certain days these people make a holiday, and pray there for the day. There is also a blessed well, called Thobar Leo, at which they pray; and after praying during the day, they go and sleep in the place mentioned above (Cloghan Leo), but it is now almost to the ground. 778 778

"On one of the stations is a granite stone which is hollowed out

[1] "A Batch of Irish Folk-Lore." Professor A. C. Haddon, *Folk-Lore*, vol. iv., p. 49.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

832 believed in, or at least spoken of, though not practised. It is called the spancel, and is thus described by C. O.[1]:—"This spancel, called in Irish 'stheioul dhrum agus tharragh,' signifying the skin of the back and of the belly, consists of a continuous band of skin taken from round the length of the body, viz. from the side of one foot up the outside of that leg and side, over the head and down the other side to the sole of the other foot, up the inside of that leg and down the inside of the other, until the stripe meets where it first set out; it is used as a love charm, and its power is believed to be irresistible, it being only necessary in order to secure the affections of the victim, to tie the spancel round him while asleep; if he does not awake during the operation all *must* turn out to the wish of the operator; if he does awake, he dies before the end of the year, so the poor desired one has no escape." The same author mentions several instances of this, which were said to have occurred shortly before he wrote (1841), one of which, the discovery of three young women taking the spancel off a corpse, is still remembered by some of the older inhabitants. There
312 are several holy wells in the district, but the most famous is the well
778 of St. Brendan, on Inishglora, the water of which is said to remain
823 sweet and pure if drawn by a man, but to turn bloody and become full of worms if a woman has the temerity to take it. Many tales are told of the misfortunes which have happened to women who persisted in drawing water from this well after being warned. There is now resident in Belmullet an old man who lived for some years on Inishglora. This man solemnly declared to the Rev. P. O'Reilly and the writer that he had three times cleared out the well after women had taken water from it, and that on each occasion it was "full of blood and corruption"; he also said that from the time he began to clean out the well until the job was completed no water flowed in, though it began to come as soon as the cleansing was finished. He added that if a woman were left alone on the island with only a male child of a month old, and she wanted to get water, the vessel would have to be held by the child's hand to prevent the water from becoming bloody.

[753] 2. *Charms and Leechcraft.*—Disease is often ascribed to supernatural agencies, and for this reason is often treated by charms or
755 incantations. There are several local "wise" men and women who treat disorders partly by means of charms, partly by herbal and animal remedies. In some cases the idea underlying the treatment

[1] "Erris and Tyrawley," p. 90.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

of water. I was told on Rathlin Island that eligible girls would take a sweating bath to clear their complexions before the annual visit to the Lammas Fair at Ballycastle on the mainland. They were in demand also during kelp-burning operations—a notoriously filthy occupation. Not all sweat-houses were built of stone. Wood-Martin quotes accounts of some which were dug into an earth bank and 'finished with sods', while others were excavated in turf banks.[1] He also records that water was sometimes poured on stones inside the sweat-house, 'thus converting it into a vapour- as well as a sweat-bath'.[2]

More intimately linked with the house is the turf-shelter, the Irish equivalent of the English coal-shed. In the drier eastern part of the country a built shelter is not necessary, and the peats, skilfully built into a huge turf-stack protected from the driving rains by a wall or gable, perhaps improve by exposure to the winds, but in the wetter west unless the turf is under cover it must be dried in small quantities in the loft or by the fire before burning. In parts of Kerry the turf is stored in large clochauns: elsewhere narrow oblong or oval stone enclosures are erected, their walls loosely built to allow the wind to blow through. The peat-store or cleit of St. Kilda was similar—an oblong corbelled stone building with open joints.

The well is another essential item of equipment of farm or clachan, and it is often provided with a corbelled stone cover. Since springs are abundant, except in bare limestone country, the wells are not deep and few are fitted with windlasses. In their absence quite elaborate ramps with stone steps are sometimes needed to obtain access to the water, and the whole structure being roofed, some examples (for instance in the south-east of Co. Down) are considerable architectural feats (Fig. 40). In the limestone districts the woman of the house may have to walk as much as half a mile to carry drinking water from a dip-well. It is now carried in buckets but was formerly transported in stave-built piggins balanced on the head. The peasant makes a virtue of necessity by asserting that almost every spring well yields 'the finest water in all Ireland, and never runs dry'. Wells are regarded as chancy things, not to be

[1] Wood-Martin, *Elder Faiths*, II (1902), 166.
[2] Ibid., 165.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

343 lightly meddled with, and if the water is not as good as usual
312 you will be told, in the phrase used for an ailing human being, that the well is 'not *at* itself at all'.

FIG. 40. Well-covers, Co. Cavan and Co. Down.

343 Finally we come to a miscellaneous assortment of outbuild-
235 ings and shelters built to house various animals and birds. Elaborate pigeon houses (ducats) designed to house hundreds of birds seem to be confined to the east and south coasts and to areas planted by English or Scots. They are no doubt manorial in origin but some existing examples were built in the early nineteenth century, though they are no longer in use. In these areas the smaller farms may have little pigeon houses made for a dozen birds, and the humblest stable is likely to have a pigeon hole or two in the gable. The birds formerly nested in hanging nests of plaited straw.

343 Cavities in the thick walls about many old farms were built
231 as dog-kennels or duck-houses, and simple shelter holes ('boles' in Ulster) were intended to house assorted three-legged iron pots (Fig. 32). An interesting variant is the bee-bole, a shelter for the bee-skep, a few examples of which have been observed in eastern Ireland.[1]

[1]R. M. Duruz and E. E. Crane, *English Bee Boles* (1955). (National Beekeeping Museum Pamphlet No. 1.)

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

PLATE 16

778
● 312

Holy well at Doon, Co. Donegal. Crutches and bushes (*behind*) swathed in rags.

[facing p. 209]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

824 known instances when a branch accidentally broken from a fairy thorn was carefully tied back in position.

797 The policy of the Church was to attach new myths to old rites, but only occasionally has the thorn tree been nominally 312 won over to Christianity by dedication to local saints or by its 778 association with sacred sites, with wells or Lammas celebrations, as for example the Criocan Thorn in the heart of Slieve Bloom.[1] On the other hand well-worship has had less stubborn roots, and 'holy water' has been more readily absorbed into Christian ritual. Nearly all the holy wells have close associations with the saints. Over 3,000 examples have been listed, most of them now half forgotten, others visited in secret and a declining number openly resorted to for cures. It is not difficult to understand the universal attraction of a spring of pure water. In the eyes of countryfolk a sense of mystery attaches to the upwelling of a spring well: it is considered lucky to have access to such a source of domestic water—a true 'well', not a hole bored in the ground—and one is invariably told that the local well yields the purest water for miles around, or even 'in all Ireland'. The attributes of purification, healing and fertility are natural concomitants of the magic welling of spring water, but besides possessing supernatural powers of this kind the holy wells are regarded as having had miraculous origins. The most famous sites where patterns are held have already been mentioned: the local holy well is rather an ever-present source of healing resorted to in need. One cannot but think of an ancient cult of waters springing from deep sources in primitive religion which was reinforced and adapted by successive intrusive cultures from the megalithic to the Christian (Pl. 16).

312 The ritual of 'paying rounds' at a well frequently involves 778 associated stones and trees. A sunwise circuit of the well is 788 made and the pilgrim, after taking a drink from the well, hangs a rag or a rosary on an adjacent bush. The ritual commonly includes also tracing with a pebble on a stone of the well-covering the mark of a cross which has been incised by countless other pebbles. This practice has a bearing on the mysterious cup-marked stones and basin-stones (bullauns) which are associated with numerous ritual sites, including wells, for I

[1] V. Cornish, *Historic Thorn Trees in the British Isles*, 58.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

believe that many examples were ground out in much the same way before the sign of the cross replaced that of the circle. Cup-marked stones are commonly found in megalithic graves, on standing stones and Bronze Age cists, both in the British Isles and further afield. Some of the larger bullauns were certainly mortars, and very similar 'knocking stones' were used until recent times for preparing barley meal by pounding the grain with a beetle or maul (Fig. 90). To judge from the frequency with which one finds a knocking stone in the ruins of an old clachan it was one of the communal possessions of such a settlement. Old specimens, more especially when the basins are sunk in an outcrop of rock, are frequently found to hold water, and they are then regarded as 'wells', the water being held efficacious as a cure for warts. That such rock-basins have magic powers is illustrated by the following reference to a site in Scotland. On the Loch Avon side of Cairngorm is a shelving rock bearing hand-made basins about a foot wide and correspondingly deep: 'sitting on them is said to be efficacious in cases of barrenness.'[1]

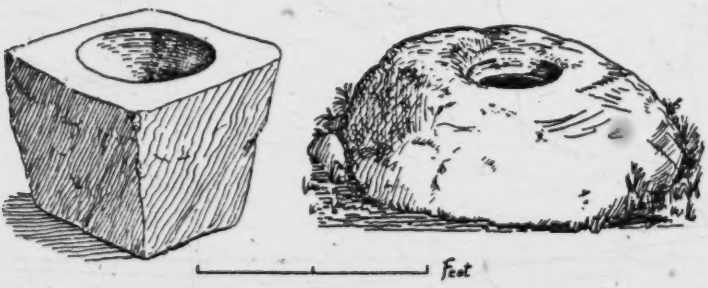

FIG. 90. Knocking stone and bullaun. Both Co. Antrim.

It is an interesting illustration of the pagan associations of cup-marks, and of the success of the symbol of the cross, that their use survived in folk practice only as cursing stones. Smooth pebbles resting in certain stone basins are turned three times against the sun. There are many examples in the west, some

[1] A. Mitchell, *The Past in the Present*, 265.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

526 perfect sphere the rounded igneous pebbles which are selected for the purpose. One wonders whether some of the many cup-marked stones which turn up in the fields in certain districts—I have seen many in Inishowen in Donegal—were used for shaping stones, such as the sling-stones with which champion slingers, of whom the legendary Cuchulainn was one, performed [411] their feats. The sling and the sling-rod were originally hunting weapons and probably instruments of war, and one of the last refuges of slinging as a pastime was the now vanished Claddagh, the fishing suburb of Galway, where a man was not reckoned a good shot until he could strike a shilling as far away as it could be seen.[1]

●312 Where a holy well has dried up—the usual explanation is that it was desecrated and moved its position—the sanctity of the 824 site may be transferred to a tree. The so-called pin-well at 778 Arboe in Co. Tyrone is a beech tree, hirsute with pins and nails, growing in the burying ground on a Celtic monastic site. A rag-well at Clonmel is visited by mountain farmers who hang rag offerings on briars at lambing and calving times, and afterwards place more rags appropriate in number to the increase obtained.[2] There is on the island of Inishmurray a wind- [821] well which has the power of controlling the wind, the ritual being to empty the well to produce a calm. Sticks and stones also 789 figure in wind-raising ceremonies, and 'the rude stone image of 778 Inniskea' (Inishkea in Co. Mayo), which was dressed up in flannel each New Year's Day, had powers of producing either storm or calm.[3] Powerful magic was worked by a wooden statue of St. Macdara, formerly kept in his chapel—an oratory of early type with projecting *antae*—on an island dedicated to the saint in the extreme south-western corner of Co. Galway. Sailors passing the island dipped their sails three times in honour of the image, but we are left to guess what superstitions were involved from the statement that about the year 1640 'the bishop of Tuam caused it to be buried for weighty reasons'.[4]

[1] *U.J.A.*, 2 (1854), 164.
[2] *Béaloideas*, 15 (1945), 284.
[3] C. Otway, *Erris and Tyrawly*, 107.
[4] C. R. Browne, *Carna and Mweenish*.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

OLD PISHROGUES

Old customs die hard in isolated islands and in the loneliness of ships at sea. Fishermen in the north to this day avoid direct mention of many words such as pig, priest and rat, and similar tabus are found among fishing communities as far away as Malaya, 'Formerly when starting on fishing expeditions the crews of Irish boats were very careful that their craft should leave the shore in a direction sunways, and even yet this superstition directs the course of many a fishing boat',[1] and, we may add, controls the casting of a net. A boat should always be entered on the right-hand side. In the kingdom of Mourne 'it was unlucky to be the third boat out on leaving harbour, and men would go to any lengths to avoid it, even tying two boats together so that there should be no third boat. On a Monday morning a fisherman will laughingly refuse to give you a light for your pipe, for he would be giving away his luck for the week. There were lucky and unlucky people to whom to sell fish, and it was the custom not to sell all the catch but to leave some fish in the boat. When a present of fish was made they were lifted backwards high over the head from the boat and not given straightforwardly. Nor would the old fishermen clean their boats until the end of the season, or even wipe the fish-scales from their boots. An unlucky boat would try to steal the luck of another boat by rubbing alongside it.'[2] The long-line fishermen of Carrickfergus would always spit on the first and last hook they baited, and in the mouth of the first fresh fish taken off the hook.[3] Superstitions attach also to fresh-water fish, especially to the sacred trout which, for the most part invisible, bring luck to pilgrims who catch a glimpse of them in certain holy wells.

Innumerable pishrogues concern the domesticated animals, and in particular cows and their milk and butter, which are peculiarly liable to supernatural influences. In the face of these unseen forces it is important that a new season or a new venture, or any operation carried out for the first time, should be begun with care and due ceremony, for special danger is attached to these occasions. Thus the first rich milk given by a

[1] Wood-Martin, *Elder Faiths*, 2, 52.
[2] E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, 196.
[3] S. McSkimin, *The History and Antiquities of Carrickfergus*, 260.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

823 [121] which give a trail its name. Folklorists have collected most of the place-names, and philologists have pondered the origins of no longer comprehended ones.

487 Trails also are referred to as roads or paths. Usually, they are bordered by stone fences from three to a dozen feet apart and are surfaced with fine gravel bound by clay. The 1842 Ordnance Survey Map shows that the network of trails in Inis Beag has remained much the same over the past century, although several [653] new paths have been added and all have been widened or otherwise improved. In recent years, the government has subsidized road improvement for several weeks each year during December and January. A senior and junior ganger supervise a group of fellow islanders—composed of those owning the gravel and clay deposits utilized, those owning land along the right of way, and those most needful of unemployment assistance—daily until the money appropriated for that year gives out. Nine major roads lead from the four villages to the back of the island; they roughly parallel each other and are reasonably straight once they climb the terraces. Crossing the middle of Inis Beag from one sound to the other necessitates traversing numerous fields and climbing high fences, since the four short paths running east and west linking five of the main roads at the back are found near the Atlantic shore. On the north side of the island, a road connects Terrace and Low Villages across the common land. This is the only major east to west artery and is the most traveled of the ten trails; passing between the cemetery and school, fences do not enclose it, and often drifting sand covers portions of it and must be shoveled away. A series of short connected paths make it possible to travel east and west along the terraces from one village to another above the main road.

• 312 Water is obtained from four principal wells near the villages and from numerous, less dependable springs at the back and along the shores of Inis Beag. Most householders also capture rain water from eaves troughs in barrels or small 312 cisterns. At one time, water was drawn from pools formed by the four major wells, 663 but now it is pumped from government built reservoirs. These reservoirs occasionally are broken open and water obtained directly from them by islanders who believe that the sealed structures and pipes leading from them to the pumps foster contamination. The government also sponsors the construction of water tanks in fields to accumulate rain water for pastured stock. Three of the wells are located in rift valleys, and the fourth is near the chapel; a potential fifth one is in the valley south of the lake, but at too great a distance from Terrace Village to have 312 been improved. Two minor unimproved springs used by villagers are situated on a terrace of the western promontory and below the post office. The springs near the coast and those at the back of the island are used mostly for watering stock, and they tend to become dry when rainfall is limited.

311 Inis Beag viewed from the top of the lighthouse presents a somber yet [333] strangely moving panorama of grey limestone pavement and fences, with patches [241] of green here and there. Many hundreds of fields meet the eye, about half of which support little or no soil, ranging in size from a fraction of an acre to over a dozen 333 acres. Three decades ago, it was possible to move easily from east to west across [653] the back of the island because the fences averaged only three feet in height; but [178] since that time, government subsidies supporting fence and field building have caused most of them to be raised to heights of from five to ten feet. The folk are

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

fishing season, will not use up so much time getting to and from the pastures. Other reasons for shifting cows are that the village wells are more dependable than the springs at the back of the island during occassional summer dry spells, and cows when "tormented" by insects can run about the terrace fields more safely than they can the rockier and more fissured indigenous and improved plots above. Milking is done between eight thirty and ten o'clock in the morning and four thirty and six in the afternoon during the winter, and an hour or two later in the summer. When milking, the farmer crouches at the right side of the beast and holds a pail with his left hand while drawing one teat at a time with his right. He murmurs to the cow in Irish to keep it pacified, and is ready to move swiftly should the animal suddenly shift its position.

To encourage cattle breeding, the government subsidizes the construction of reservoirs at the back of the island for collecting rain water, and of barns and outbuildings for storing hay, rye, potatoes, and farming and fishing equipment. The typical reservoir is placed in an area surrounded by actual or potential grazing land located at a considerable distance from the nearest spring. It is composed of a cemented stone platform with a slanting concave surface which drains into a rectangular shaped tank. Barns and outbuildings are small stone structures, usually thatched, which are single roomed and doored and may have one or two small windows. The barns, like the reservoirs, are placed within easy access of fields used for pasturage.

Sheep are reared in Inis Beag to furnish wool, as well as to be sold and slaughtered for local consumption. They demand little care, as they are allowed to graze in undeveloped pastures and to obtain water from rain filled depressions in the pavement and from plants that they devour. Kept by their owners for five or six years and then disposed of, they are sheared once a year between May and July. There are white, brown, and black haired varieties, and between six and eight pounds of wool can be procured from an animal every shearing. If a householder possesses a large herd, he may choose to sell some of his lambs when they are six months old, and in August many lambs are shipped from Inis Beag on the steamer. Although some folk from time to time slaughter their own sheep to provide meat for the tables, several householders maintain large herds and specialize in selling lamb and mutton to visitors and fellow islanders.

All Inis Beag homes have at least one dog and most of them have a cat. These animals perform certain services and act as pets. At the time walls were low at the back of the island, dogs were employed to round up sheep, and they also aided their owners hunt rabbits along the rock piled shore of the west sound, when the meat of this animal was eaten more commonly than it is today. Now, their duties are restricted to warning of the approach of strangers and chasing chickens out of the kitchen. Cats are kept to catch mice, and their presence on the premises is sufficient to keep rats from approaching the house and outbuildings. They are treated less well than dogs, but both dogs and cats are given little affection and often are not fed enough. It is true that some islanders are strongly attached to their pets and provide them with adequate care, but they are the exceptions. A man devoted to his dog will be followed about the island by the animal, and a desired trait in a dog is that it will not show interest in persons outside of the

16 Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

duced trawlers and other types of fishing vessels and financed their purchase by islanders of the region, sent instructors to teach fishermen how to use the new boats and gear, set up curing and storage facilities in the islands, facilitated the shipping of fish to mainland markets, and attempted to regulate these markets so as to ensure maximum profits for the folk. These efforts failed for the most part in Inis Beag, and today the men fish from *curach*, much as did their grandfathers. The continuing effort of the government to improve fishing in the area is reflected in instruction in modern fishing techniques at a school in a nearby island, and the successful operation of a number of government financed trawlers and other fishing boats from there.

The islanders consider fish from the sea, which are netted, more palatable and healthier to eat than those caught with lines and trawls, fresh water fish, and fish which have been cured or frozen. Fish taken on lines, because they bleed, and those enmeshed in trawls, because they suffocate, are thought to suffer in taste and nourishment, as do those which are treated artificially for sale; and fresh water fish are believed to be unhealthy to eat because they feed on refuse thrown into lakes and rivers rather than on natural foods. Some folk exclude even mackerel from their diet, since these fish "swim on the surface and eat everything dirty afloat." We already have noted that Inis Beag elders prefer seaweed to chemical fertilizers; the preference for netted fish which feed on natural foods to fresh water fish and mackerel which are contaminated is another example of a recurrent cultural theme—the positive valuation of natural objects and the negative valuation of artificial ones which come in contact with the human body. Other manifestations of this theme are the emphasis placed on folk medicines and the distrust of medicines prescribed by nurse and doctor, the belief that certain foods will assure health and combat specific illnesses, and the fear of piped water and canned foods. I often was told that I could improve my eyesight by giving up my glasses and rubbing dew on my eyelids, or by walking along the seashore to allow the wind and spray to penetrate my eyeballs.

Over 30 varieties of fish are caught off Inis Beag, some with lines of varying length and number of hooks, others in the four types of nets, and a few with both lines and nets. Most important of the fish are: ling, cod, bream, gurnet, haddock, and autumn mackerel caught with lines; plaice, turbot, rock fish, and pollack both netted and taken on lines; and herring and spring mackerel captured in special nets. Trammel and drag nets are used in addition to herring and mackerel nets, and the most commonly used baits are gurnet, haddock, conger eel, bream, herring, and limpets. Fishing techniques vary considerably, as do the times of the year when particular kinds of fish are available, the localities that they frequent, and the baits which are most effective for each variety. Fishing crews form at different times of the year, often to fish in certain areas for specific fish. They are composed of both kin and close friends, and they tend to alter in membership from year to year as other activities intrude.

Before I leave the subject of fishing, I wish to correct three commonly held misconceptions concerning Inis Beag men: they are all skilled seamen; because they spend much of their time at sea they are of necessity able swimmers; and

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

to put their property in a state of good repair, which, in retrospect, is regarded as a benefit, however much they might have complained of the labor involved during the previous weeks.

The sacred well, probably appropriated from the Druids 13 centuries ago, still attracts the folk and occasionally pilgrims from Inis Thiar and other islands. On the mainland, patterns often were associated with holy wells named after saints, but this does not seem to have been the case in Inis Beag. It was customary until about ten years ago for those who came to pray here to attach bits of cloth, rosaries, or sacred objects obtained from holy places of pilgrimage on the mainland and abroad, but this practice was halted by the clergy as smacking of paganism. Now it is visited for religious purposes mostly by small groups on Sunday afternoon, and by persons about to emigrate and their families who come to pray for the good fortune of the soon departed. The water in the spring is not considered holy, but capable of "bringing the grace of God and the saint," and if it is drunk during prayer, it is believed to be especially efficacious for curing sterility, among other afflictions. In this century, a partially blind islander is believed to have regained his sight after paying nine visits to the well on successive Sundays, and other miraculous cures from earlier times are reported. Those who come to the spring always seek a tiny fish or eel in the water, which, if observed, is merely a good omen to some but an assurance of reaching Heaven to others. Attaching rags to the well ..... seeking cures and omens there are all examples of reinterpretation. The spring also is used as a source of water by farmers who pasture stock in nearby fields and by thirsting passersby.

Pagan Supernaturalism

Pagan supernaturalism is disavowed by the folk, and it is difficult to know how widely held are beliefs in this sphere. That they are held is indisputable, as attested by the active efforts of curates up to this day to eradicate them. Youth of the island overtly deny the existence of other than church approved spiritual entities, although the most outspoken disclaimer of paganism among them is visited occasionally by the ghost of his father, who urges the continuation of a family feud. But elders cling tenaciously to indigenous beliefs and practices, about which they are extremely secretive for fear of being ridiculed by outsiders and their more skeptical fellows. Defensive about being labeled backward, the islanders feel that the "superstitions" they are said to hold most contribute to this impression. When the folk talk of pagan retentions and reinterpretations, they ascribe them to those who lived at the time that their parents or grandparents did, or to certain of their superstitious contemporaries. A notorious dissenter, who sometimes has occasion to patrol the shores of Inis Beag before dawn, antagonizes his neighbors by deriding them for their fear of venturing after dark to the back of the island, where fairies and ghosts hold sway. On telling him of my intention to spend a night resting atop a *clochán* near the Atlantic coast, he said, "The only thing that will happen is you'll hear the cocks crow in the morning." He is the only person who admitted to me that he disbelieves the teachings of the church concerning the soul